



LIFELINK

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Keeping the Connection Strong through Counseling

While many couples may be feeling love-struck by Cupid's arrow with Valentine's Day quickly approaching, that love and affection may not necessarily mean that things are always rosy. Relationships are protective factors against stress and adversity, and healthy communication is a vital component of keeping them strong. The ability to express yourself clearly while also being able to listen attentively can help build **trust** with your partner, ensuring that you both feel secure and validated.

A great setting for this useful communication is in counseling, where licensed therapists offer unbiased facilitation of discussion among partners to help you develop practical skills. This can include talking through thoughts and feelings, and exploring different ways to think or act in the relationship. Counseling can provide a safe space to proactively work through the challenges of a new or long-time marriage, a relationship that's been strained by long deployments and frequent transitions, and a myriad of other stressors that Navy couples may face. Counseling services available to Sailors and their spouses include (but are not limited to):

- **Non-Medical Counseling:** Available through Military OneSource and the Military and Family Life Counseling (MFLC) Program, these free services offer short-term counseling with trained and licensed mental health professionals that can help you and your partner navigate a variety of relationship stressors, from reintegration challenges post-deployment, to parenting issues and more. Military OneSource sessions can be conducted via phone, secure video, online chat, or in-person. MFLC services are provided in-person. For more information, visit www.militaryonesource.mil.
- **Counseling, Advocacy and Prevention (CAP):** Navy's CAP services offer individual, group and family counseling, including non-medical counseling, clinical counseling and family advocacy. These services are available free of charge to active duty personnel and their families at your local Fleet and Family Support Center (FFSC). A referral is not required for clinical and non-medical counseling offered through FFSCs and your command is not notified that you are seeking care. For more information and to contact your local FFSC, click [here](#).

- **Navy Chaplains:** Navy chaplains provide a safe, non-judgmental and **confidential** space for individual Sailors and their family members to work through challenges, build connection and strengthen their spiritual fitness together. Chaplain Care is available in-person through your local chaplain or you can reach out to **Navy311** to be connected with one. The Navy Chaplain Corps also operates **Chaplains Religious Enrichment Development Operation (CREDO)**. This program aims to strengthen spiritual well-being and individual resilience for Navy service members, civilians and families through workshops, seminars and retreats. Most CREDO sites have a Facebook page where you can find information and offerings.

While professional help from a therapist is extremely useful, connecting with peers who have faced similar challenges can promote connectedness. Spouses can reach out to a local **Fleet and Family Readiness Group** for social support and "survival skills." Additionally, the **DoD Be There Peer Support Call and Outreach Center** offers Sailors and their families free, anonymous and confidential support from trained peer coaches.

Counseling for marital or family concerns not related to violence by the Sailor *is not required* to be reported when answering question 21 on Standard Form 86. For more information on psychological health treatment and security clearances, check out [this](#) Every Sailor, Every Day campaign infographic.



Lifelink Spotlight

Healing from PTSD through Woodwork

A relaxing hobby can make a huge difference in navigating psychological health symptoms. After a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnosis, veteran Bruce Empol picked up an old hobby he had enjoyed before his military days: woodworking.

As an 18-year-old, Empol had “grown up fast,” serving in the Navy in Vietnam. On the USS Fechteler (DD 870), he and his fellow Sailors provided fire support to Marines and Soldiers on the ground near the Mekong Delta. Realizing that he could be killed at any moment was a difficult reality to face.

When his contract ended and he went back home, Empol didn't anticipate the struggles of transitioning to civilian life. He married and started a new career as a union electrician, however, he found himself haunted by his experiences in Vietnam and frustrated with the way he was being treated as a returning vet. Empol's behavior began to change. “I found myself shying away from crowds, not going to the movies, and sitting with my back to the wall when I went out so I wouldn't have people around me,” he says in a related **All Hands** story. He withdrew from social activities and often had nightmares and violent outbursts, which eventually led to the end of his marriage. He remarried but the behavior did not change. A public altercation in front of his second wife led Empol to seek help. He reached out to the VA and began treatment for PTSD.

Woodworking became a way for Empol to take his mind off of the memories from Vietnam. He enjoyed the solitude of his workshop where he made small wooden toys for his grandchildren. “I'm in my own world,” he said. “With all the ruckus around me, I can come out here and just be myself—no stress.” Eventually, Empol began giving his toys away to military families, which gave him a sense accomplishment.

Now a strong advocate for veterans and service members dealing with PTSD, Empol encourages help-seeking behavior. “You can't do it yourself,” he says. “The more you talk, the better it is. Do not hold it in. Because the only one you're going to destroy is yourself.”

Read more about Bruce Empol and see a video about his story [here](#).

For more information on PTSD, visit the **Department of Veteran's Affairs' National Center for PTSD, Real Warriors, Military OneSource**, or the **Defense Health Agency**.



Plan of the Week Notes

Below are sample Plan of the Week notes aligning with topics covered by the Every Sailor, Every Day campaign during the month of February:

1. Maintaining positive relationships, whether with friends, family, or a romantic partner, is a great way to have a strong support system and better navigate stress. Listening, connecting, and communicating are key factors in relationships of all kinds. Learn some tips about how to invest in your relationships on our blog at <https://navstress.wordpress.com/2016/02/26/relationship-goals/>.
2. If you didn't “Give the Gift of a Designated Driver” during the holiday season, it's not too late. Save your friends, family or shipmates the stress of dealing with a DUI by taking the pledge to be a DD at <https://go.usa.gov/xnj86> by February 14. For tips on how to have a stress-free DD experience, check out our blog at <https://navstress.wordpress.com/2017/12/15/got-the-keys-5-tips-to-be-a-stress-free-dd/>.
3. Stress causes increased heart rate and production of LDL cholesterol and blood glucose. Increased stress can also lead to poor diet, lack of physical activity, and sleep problems. These factors can eventually cause high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol. The Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center's February Health Promotion and Wellness Toolbox has tips for staying healthy. Check it out at: <http://go.usa.gov/x9Frv>.
4. The BeThere Peer Support Call and Outreach Center is a free and confidential resource for you or your fellow Sailor who may need some help navigating life's stressors. Find support and resources on their website 24/7 at www.betherepeersupport.org, via text at 480-360-6188 or at 1-844-357-7337.

Proper Disposal of Prescription Medications is Means Safety

Practicing means safety ensures that lethal means of suicide such as certain prescription drugs are out of reach during times of particularly high stress. Dispose of unwanted, unused or expired medications by emptying them into a sealable plastic bag with used coffee grounds or another undesirable substance, and throwing the bag and empty bottles in the trash. Use a dark marker to cross out your personal information from the label. Drop boxes are available at some Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs). Check with your local MTF to see if they are participating in this program, and share [this video](#) with your shipmates to help them learn more about using drop boxes.

News and Resources

Using Social Media to Stay
Connected
[Real Warriors](#)

Stress, Attachment, and
Resilience in Military Children
[Psychological Health Center of
Excellence](#)

Simple Ways to Become
Spiritually Fit
[Guard Your Health](#)

Staying Resilient While Your
Partner is Deployed
[Military OneSource](#)

How Conflict Can Work for
Couples
[Human Performance Resource Center](#)

Follow These Stress Relief Tips
[Military OneSource](#)

Peer Support for Military
Spouses
[Real Warriors](#)

Things That Make You Go
'Om': Meditation for Healthy
Living
[Health.mil](#)

Got Anxiety? Get Excited
Instead
[Human Performance Resource Center](#)

Shedding Light on Vitamin D
[Health.mil](#)

Why just "embrace the suck"
of goal failure?
[Human Performance Resource Center](#)

Millennials and Mental Health
[American Foundation for Suicide
Prevention](#)

Keep What You've Earned:
Give the Gift of a Designated
Driver
[All Hands](#)

Current and Upcoming Events

Heart Health Month
February
Resources available [here](#).

Dialogue with DSPO
Feb. 14, 10 a.m. CST
[Log in here](#)

SPC Training Webinars
Feb. 8, 12 p.m. CST
Feb. 21, 4 p.m. CST
[Register here](#)

How Stress Impacts Your Heart Health

Heart disease refers to numerous problems which are often related to plaque build-up in the heart's arteries (atherosclerosis). There are a variety of risk factors for heart disease, some of which may be out of your control, such as genetics and age. Other risk factors – such as lack of exercise, an unhealthy diet or unchecked stress – can be minimized through lifestyle changes. That's good news considering that heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States.



Stress is a natural reaction; it is the body's way of coping with a perceived threat. As part of the 'fight or flight' response, stress signals the body to produce more energy by elevating the heart rate, increasing production of LDL cholesterol and blood glucose. This response should subside when the perceived threat (stressor) is no longer present. However, when we're unable to unwind or are exposed to stress for a prolonged amount of time, the short and long term effects can be damaging. Stress can lead to poor eating choices, missed workouts and a lack of sleep. Without action, this combination of factors may lead to high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes.

According to the 2013 Fleet and Marine Corps Health Risk Assessment, only 12 percent of active duty Navy respondents and 13 percent of active duty Marine respondents indicated that they experienced work stress. However, those numbers increased as time away from home station increased.

When dealing with stress, some people engage in unhealthy behaviors to try to relax. These may include smoking, overeating, drinking too much alcohol, using drugs, or sleeping too much or too little. While these behaviors seem to provide temporary satisfaction, they are not helpful for mitigating stress long term. In fact, **smoking** can negatively impact your heart health by causing cardiovascular disease and stroke. There are several **benefits** to quitting smoking, some that occur right away, including decreased blood pressure and risk of heart attack.

To help navigate stress in a healthy way, follow these tips:

- Eat a balanced diet, stay hydrated, and **limit caffeine** and alcohol;
- **Exercise** regularly to reduce stress, burn calories and improve sleep;
- Get **7–8 hours of sleep**; and
- Use **relaxation** techniques, such as deep breathing exercises.

Not all risk factors can be avoided, but exercising **Controllability** when it comes to navigating stress and making lifestyle choices can reduce risk. Small acts can help you do your part to protect your heart, improve your health and enhance your military readiness.

*February is Heart Health Month. The Every Sailor, Every Day campaign thanks Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center for providing the above information, which can be found in their fact sheets "**Heart Health: Risk Factors and Lifestyle Choices**" and "**Help your Heart, Help your Life**" located in the February **HPW Toolbox**. MedLine Plus has more tips on navigating stress [here](#).*